

Christmas & Winter Festivities  
by Larry J Pellet



Winter festivities and Christmas cheer were the order at the Harris/Verdoni’s Event Center Dec 20th, 2019, as Fruitport businessman and ring leader Doug Melching took center stage as Santa Claus, Gene Autry and most importantly, the role



of his charismatic and flamboyant self. A full house of approximately 250 guests, including former city leaders, paleontologists, business associates, family, friends and children of all ages were treated to hors d’oeuvres, drinks and a nourishing full course meal. On hand to hand out presents were Santa’s elves, while a pre-dinner time orchestra led by Dan Seabolt entertained the light hearted crowd.

Melching, who’s alter ego Santa Claus would rival the real St. Nick, welcomed the patrons as they entered, hugging and greeting, and together with his elves took



Anna & son Mav

pictures with guests on a decorated “jolly” stage. Adding to the mix was a western theme, and cowboys were on hand to open doors and accommodate the crowd.

As the spirit of the evening progressed, attendees of all walks of life and all forms of Christmas attire mingled, shared laughs and enjoyed the warmth and love of the

season. Without skipping a beat, it was time for the second act of the Melching show. Switching from his Claus outfit to Gene Autry attire, the one-man circus joined the orchestra in a crowd-favorite rendition of “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer”, after which he gave a short and touching speech on his childhood, generously sharing a bit of his sentimental side. Musicians toured the tables during dinner with guitars, double base, mandolins and violins, and a women’s



choir sang for the audience while they ate. Afterwards, Melching led the clan with a sing a-long of “You are my Sunshine”, and blazed a trail through the crowd with



his Autry guns a-blazin’, being the pied piper that he is.

Friend and fellow fossil collector Jerry Jacene remarked on the comradery of the night and his relationship with Doug. “Family doesn’t have to be blood...you have to go through hard times sometimes”, referring to their bond. And, amused by the antics of the host, added, “The man never stops”.

And he didn’t. As the gala eventually dwindled down, those that lingered gathered around the man who made it all happen. Ever entertaining, ever sharing the joy, and ever the conduit to what Christmas parlays...hope, good will, and great tidings!



*Happy 32nd Anniversary.*  
*Tim & Lin!*

To a Dad and Mom who have given everything for us and others, thank you. We truly appreciate your self-sacrifice, perseverance, and strong faith in raising us all and in the way you handle different situations every day. May God bless you with many more years together!

*We all love you!*  
*—your kids*



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